

Eshoo Votes for Legislation to Ease Passport Backlog

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congresswoman Anna G. Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, voted Monday to enable the State Department to temporarily rehire retired Foreign Service workers to help process the massive backlog of passport applications which has forced millions of Americans to delay or cancel their overseas travel plans this year.

"Three million Americans, including thousands of my constituents, have had to postpone or cancel their business trips and vacations because the Bush Administration vastly underestimated the increase in passport applications triggered by new security rules for travel in the Western Hemisphere," Eshoo said.

"This bill will bring relief to the current crisis by temporarily increasing the State Department's workforce, but it's only a first step," Eshoo said. "The State Department has to take additional steps to increase its capacity to efficiently and securely process applications as the demand for passports continues to grow."

Passport applications surged by 33 percent this year and processing time doubled to three months after new security rules took effect in January. The rules require U.S. citizens to have a passport to fly to Canada, Mexico and Bermuda. The backlog hit California travelers particularly hard and overwhelmed the San Francisco Passport Office, where pending applications were stacked floor-to-ceiling in the office's lunch room.

On Monday, the House unanimously passed S. 966, the Passport Backlog Reduction Act, which gives the State Department the authority to hire retired former Foreign Service workers who are trained and authorized to process passport applications. Current law denies retirement benefits to these retirees if they exceed strict caps on wages and work hours. S 966 temporarily waives the caps to enable these workers to be rehired.

On June 22nd, Eshoo led 46 bipartisan members of the California Congressional Delegation in writing to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to urge her to deal with the current crisis and come up with a systematic plan to meet the future demand for passports. Rice has not responded to the letter.

Read Rep. Eshoo's Letter to Secretary Rice.

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